ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

J. P. ARENDZEN

The Treasury of the Faith Series: 33

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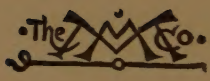
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ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

By

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INTRODUCTION

THOSE who carefully study everyday conditions clearly see that religious faith is breaking down among those outside the Catholic Church. Religious indifferentism is growing more and more prevalent. In the daily newspapers and in magazines shallow writers allude scornfully to religious dogma as something long since relegated to the scrap heap of antiquated ideas. The doctrine of eternal punishment is especially ridiculed. There is a growing number of men and women who seem to consider it extremely vulgar to take Jesus Christ literally and to believe in hell.

We have sympathy for the man or woman who has real spiritual difficulties, for those who are earnestly striving to find the light of Faith. We have little patience with carping, shallow critics who scoff at revealed truth, or who would ask Jesus Christ to compromise with them on His doctrine. To argue with such scoffers is a waste of time. While posing as being intellectually broad-minded, they are for the most part ignorant and narrow-minded. They have

never seriously studied Holy Scripture with attention to the Hebrew and Greek texts; they have little or no knowledge of the writings of the Fathers of the Church. While professing to be well read, they are unfamiliar with any standard works on Catholic belief.

Dr. Arendzen's excellent little volume was written to answer the objections which beset many honest minds in regard to eternal punishment. These difficulties usually arise from a lack of knowledge of Catholic teaching or from a misunderstanding of the nature of sin and its malice as an offense against God. The reader will not only find a clear explanation of Catholic doctrine, but will be pleased to note that the objections against the doctrine of hell are met honestly and with a clearness that should be helpful to those wishing to know what the Catholic Church teaches. While the doctrine of hell is based on revelation, the author shows that there is in it nothing contrary to right reason when the nature of God and the malice of sin are properly understood. The objections raised against the eternity of hell are not dictates of reason, but rather a darkening of reason by feelings and sentiment.

This small work, like the other volumes of The Treasury of the Faith Series, should prove interesting and valuable to priests and Sisters in

charge of instruction classes. It comes at a time when there is great need of a clear exposition of the doctrine of hell, for we meet even some who call themselves Catholics yet speak in an apologetic tone of this doctrine of our Faith. There are those who seem to resent that this truth should so frequently be stressed in the Catholic pulpit. Pope Benedict XV, in his Encyclical on Preaching the Word of God (June 15, 1917), is most emphatic about not minimizing the doctrines of Jesus Christ. Praising St. Paul's zeal in his preaching, the Pope says: "Hence he delivered to them all Christ's doctrines and precepts, even the most severe; neither passing them over nor whittling them down—humility, self-denial, chastity, contempt of the world, obedience, forgiveness of injuries and the like, and this without timidity; for men must choose between God and Belial, since they cannot serve both. A terrible judgment awaits each one at his death. We cannot drive a bargain with God; either we shall obey His law completely, and gain everlasting life, or we shall obey our passions with no other prospect but eternal fire."

Rev. Charles J. Mullaly, S.J.
Editor, *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

PUNISHMENT is pain justly inflicted in consequence of evil done. It is purely medicinal, if its sole purpose is to bring the evil-doer to repentance and to enable him to undo the evil wrought. It is purely vindictive or avenging, if its purpose is to vindicate and restore the glory and honour of one who has been offended by the evil deed, and thus to restore the balance of justice by placing the evil-doer in an evil plight on account of the evil done.

Punishments on earth are, or ought to be, chiefly of a mixed character, partly curative, partly vindictive. The punishment of hell is purely vindictive. It has no medicinal purpose for the sinner undergoing it, though it has also a preventive purpose, by being a deterrent to others.

The righteousness of vindictive justice is almost instinctively admitted by every reason-

able person. When misdeeds entail no suffering for the offender, when crimes pass unpunished —the wicked prosper and the good succumb— there arises in every human soul the irresistible conviction that something is lacking, something wrong in the arrangement of the Universe; also that such wrong cannot last for ever, and that in the end it must go well with the just and ill with the evil-doer.

This profound conviction is based on the idea that sin and suffering are correlatives; I mean that every sin committed necessarily entails the liability to a corresponding punishment, so that the balance of justice may be maintained. It is true that repentance obtains forgiveness. But repentance itself contains the will to make satisfaction, and satisfaction is a punishment which the sinner voluntarily inflicts upon himself in consequence of his sin, in order that the Great Orderer of the Universe may not inflict punishment, which has already been voluntarily endured.

Were, however, no evil consequence to follow the disobedience of an unrepentant sinner, man might rightly accuse the Supreme Guardian of the world of failing to vindicate the law of holiness, and might conclude that no holy intelligence was directing and controlling the order of created things. In strictly technical language,

God wills the order of this Universe, and must necessarily continue to will it, as long as it exists, for to maintain its existence is to will its order. Now the sinner rebels against this order. He cannot indeed infringe it objectively, for God's will is sovereign and omnipotent, but he can pervert his own will and commit an act contrary to his final end, by adhering inordinately to an object of desire and enjoyment. If the order of the Universe is to be maintained, the sinner's will must of necessity be contravened and thwarted in the same measure as he himself has contravened and thwarted the due order by God established. Now all thwarting of the will is sorrow, and if in consequence of sin, such sorrow is punishment.

Punishment, therefore, must follow sin as its shadow. Punishment is the counterpoise of sin, demanded by intrinsic necessity to restore the balance of righteousness. As water seeks its own level, so punishment succeeds sin. Sufferings may be self-inflicted, as when we do penance; or inflicted by God, and then they are called punishment.

Vindictive justice, therefore, is in itself the maintenance of order. It is properly called avenging or vindictive justice in the case of divine punishments, because God, who maintains the order of the Universe, is a personal

God, not an abstract force, and all the laws of the Universe are enacted by his personal will. The sinner, therefore, not only attempts to break the objective order of the Universe in which he lives, but he offends the personal God who created him. The sinner by his deed—as far as in him lies—deprives God of the honour due to him in the obedience of all created wills and their gratitude for the benefit of their own existence. Divine punishments, therefore, vindicate God's glory and in themselves are a manifestation of God's holiness.

When thinking of an avenging God we must eliminate from our mind any idea that God desires or thirsts to be satiated with the sight of suffering. God desires or thirsts for nothing. No sin, however great, can lessen God's happiness. No sinner can hurt God. God is not injured as we are injured on earth, smarting under the pain of the insult. Hence it is not a question of God paying the sinner back in his own coin —for every hurt received a hurt inflicted. God in punishing can have only one motive: his own infinite holiness and nothing else whatever.

Eternal punishment is the everlasting separation of God from the sinner, because the sinner continues to reject him; it is the allowing creatures to torment the sinner, because he has turned to creatures instead of to God as his

ultimate end. This punishment is everlasting, not because God can never be satiated with the sight of the sinner's pain, but because the sinner abides by his final choice, preferring a created good to God, and can no longer change his mind. He is eternally punished because he is eternally in the state of sin.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

1. *The Pain of Loss*

As in many minds the word hell stands merely for some confused idea of endless horror and misery, without any precise conception of its nature and what the Catholic Church teaches concerning it, we must needs begin with a simple exposition of what the Church means by hell.

What, then, is hell?

It is primarily the permanent deprivation of the Beatific Vision, inflicted on those who die in mortal sin.

Unbaptised children and unbaptised adults who were so mentally defective as to be incapable of choosing between good and evil, will after life also lack the Beatific Vision. Such absence of Beatific Vision, when merely the consequence of original sin, is, however, seldom designated in English by the word "hell," though in Latin the technical term "infernum" is some-

times used for it. In this treatise we are not discussing the state of unbaptised infants[1] or mentally defectives, we are dealing exclusively with the punishment of those who die guilty of personal mortal sin, a punishment which primarily consists in the penal deprivation of the Beatific Vision.

The Beatific Vision is the sight of God face to face. This supernatural state of final bliss is studied in the treatise *The Church Triumphant*,[2] the reading of which will contribute much to a fuller understanding of this treatise on hell.

Here we can consider the Beatific Vision only negatively, because its punitive absence constitutes the very essence of eternal damnation.

The natural end of man would have been to know God indirectly through his creatures, and to love him with a love corresponding to such knowledge. For such natural end man, as a matter of fact, was never destined. God gave him only a supernatural end, which is the direct sight of God without any intermediary, the vision which the Scriptures aptly describe as "face to face."

To have lost this end through one's own fault constitutes the very nature of hell. It is called damnation, from the Latin word *damnum*,

[1] See Vol. X of this series, pp. 79-85.
[2] Vol. XXXV.

which means simply "loss." It is the Great Loss. It is a loss which nothing can replace. The supernatural end of man having been lost by actual sin, no other end or purpose of a lower or natural kind can be attained. The sinner who loses the Beatific Vision loses his all, for his soul, though endowed with never-ending existence, will never attain the end or purpose to which none the less it must by the force of his nature eternally tend. It is the final and never-ceasing frustration of the craving of an immortal being.

In one sense one might speak of it as an infinite loss. For the object lost is God himself—God as the object of human knowledge and love. On the other hand, the loss is subjectively and strictly speaking not infinite. The pain of loss depends on the realisation of the value of the thing lost. Even on earth two people may lose an object of intrinsically the same value and feel the loss unequally. All the damned lose God, yet the punishment of all, however great, will not be equal, for the loss of God will mean more to one than to another.

It is sometimes said that the damned at the judgement will for a moment see God and then be deprived of his sight for ever. This is, however, an incorrect way of speaking. Once God is seen face to face, the soul will love him eternally; once the Beatific Vision is granted, it will

never be withdrawn. Though this particular expression, therefore, is incorrect, still it is prompted by a true idea. Unless the soul were granted a deeper and greater realisation of what God is than it had possessed on earth, the loss of the immediate vision of God would mean but little to it. Some flash of light must pierce the darkened mind, revealing to it the awful greatness and beauty of God at least in some indirect way in order that it may realise what it has lost. For us on earth God always remains something unseen and, as it were, abstract. He is the Great Unknown, at the back of the Universe, he is its maker and its maintainer, therefore all creation proclaims him indeed, but at the same time hides him from our sight. His very existence is only an inference, a valid inference, a spontaneous inference of reason, but still only a conclusion. He is not in himself an object of mental sight. We understand that he must contain within himself all perfections of the Universe, but in a higher, more eminent way. We know God indeed also by revelation, he stands revealed in Jesus Christ, but even this revelation is not direct sight. The Apostles saw Christ's manhood, not his Godhead, and what they have told us reveals the divinity indirectly but not in itself. Moreover, on earth even this indirect knowledge remains only a dim realisation, be-

cause of the thousand attractions of sense, which interfere with our religious meditation. In consequence, to lose God does not in this life mean to us that unspeakable calamity which it in reality is.

The loss of the Beatific Vision is the great failure. On earth no failure is complete, because it is always retrievable, if not in itself, at least in some other way. Hell means total failure, failure of the whole of one's being, failure without any hope of retrieving what is lost.

The impulse to re-start after failure is almost instinctive during this life. There will be no re-starting life after this final disaster. All is over, the soul is forced to face utter ruin, beyond repair. All that is left is blank despair.

In the life beyond the grave where all illusions about earthly goods have completely gone, where the turmoil of this material world has ceased, where the soul has outgrown the limitations of this mortal life, and realises with a mental keenness unknown on earth the inner truth of things, the loss of God is a disaster exceeding in extent all that we can now conceive. We now know that we are made for God, and that the possession of God is our final end, but we realise it in a faint, obscure way only. Few people have felt an intense hunger for God. Some saints, indeed, have done so; they have at

moments been driven almost beside themselves with a desire to see God, they have felt an agonising pain in the delay, and some have welcomed death, which would give them the object of their desire. Those instances, however, are rare.

The kaleidoscopic variation of earthly affairs distracts us, and the good things of the world satisfy us at least in part; bodily necessities interrupt our higher mental life continually. None of this happens in eternity. Man has come to his final state in which with all his mental power and the whole energy of his will he either possesses God or, losing him, is aware of the complete and everlasting failure of his existence. Every fibre of his being tends toward God by inward necessity; God draws him as a magnet draws iron, his innermost self thrills with longing for God, who is infinite goodness, beauty, and truth, yet he is intimately conscious that his nature is so warped, disfigured, and deformed that it can never be united to God. Between himself and God there is a gulf fixed which no bridge will ever span. Nor is God a distant object, which he might manage to forget. God is intimately present to him, but this presence is a torment, not a joy, for holiness is both an object of horror and of desire to those that are in sin. Every instant of his never-ending life he wants God and he knows that he

wants him, yet every instant he feels an irresistible recoil, a disgust, a loathing and a hatred, which turns him from that which he wants.

To speak in a parable, he is like a shipwrecked mariner in a little craft on the open sea. He raves with maddening thirst, though surrounded by water. He lifts the sea water to his lips and then vomits it out, for it is salt. The salt is his sin. His sin has turned even the sweet waters of God's goodness brackish; it is a venom which he always tastes and makes him hate even God as poison, though at the same time he is mad with thirst for God.

If, perhaps, a reader in perusing the following pages feels inclined to think that this is all rhetoric, and not a sober and objective treatment of the problem, he must remember that hell is a matter of revelation, and that the source of our knowledge is what Christ and the Apostles have revealed. If they spoke in figures, our way to truth is by analysing and probing the full bearing of what they said.

Christ speaks of hell as the losing of one's soul: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?"[1] This expression: "losing one's soul," does not mean cessation of existence, for we

[1] Matt. xvi 26.

know that the soul is immortal; but it does mean the complete cessation of that supernatural life of grace, which God intended for it, and without which man has utterly failed of the purpose of his being. If a man—an adult, who has had the choice between good and evil and with complete deliberation has chosen evil and died persisting in his choice—fails to obtain the Beatific Vision, there is no substitute for it as the aim of his life. He has lost his soul in the fullest sense of the word. All that remains to him is eternal existence without purpose, or rather with a purpose that can never be achieved, never even be approached throughout eternity. It is the complete aimlessness of a never-ending life which is the appalling state of the lost soul. It is an asking never to receive, a seeking never to find, a knocking at a gate eternally closed, to hear for ever: "Amen, amen, I know you not."

In hell nothing of the supernatural remains except the marks of baptism, confirmation, and the priesthood, nothing except the bitter memory of graces once received, and these things remain to enhance eternal sorrow, the sense of the greatness of what is lost.

In contrast to "the saved," the damned are called "the lost." No word could express more precisely and almost technically their real state.

They are lost. By creating us, God sent us on a journey, a journey towards himself, a journey which was meant to end in a home-coming. The home intended is a nestling in the very bosom of God, the complete possession, the closest embrace by mind and will of God himself. For the damned the journey will never end, home and rest will never be; they are lost. For them is eternal restlessness without progression. They are wanderers, idly, foolishly, hopelessly wandering hither and thither, never making headway toward God. Although no belated traveller ever had a fiercer desire than they to be able to say: "Home at last," they will never say it; it is for ever dying on their lips.

St Jude in his epistle has an inspired description of the wicked which because of its very divine inspiration is of the greatest value in understanding the state of the damned. He calls them: "Clouds without water, carried about by the winds; trees of autumn, unfruitful, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own confusion; wandering stars, to whom the storm of darkness is reserved for ever."[1]

A cloud pregnant with beneficent rain is a source of blessing, a steady cloud that is a shield to the glare of the sun is a cause of joy, but

[1] Verse 12.

clouds without water, swept across the sky by a hurricane, are flimsy things of nothing, the symbol of the utterly useless, the utterly wasted, the thing that was and is gone, and has left no trace.

The wicked are like trees that had chance of bearing fruit, but have not done so. Their summer is over, and no second summer will be given them. They are dead in their innermost being, dug up by the roots, severed from all that lives by the Spirit of God, rotting alone in eternal corruption.

The wicked are as the raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own confusion. On the shores of eternity they are breaking the surging waves of their furious passions, but the roar of their turbulent yearnings will never cease and their utmost endeavour will for ever end in idle spray.

The wicked are wandering stars to whom the storm of darkness is reserved for ever. Some comets with a long trail of splendour approach the sun with incredible speed, but they swing round the centre light without touching it, and then start their path back into space and their parabola ends in infinity. Thus out of nothing did God create human souls, endowed them with a trail of glory, and sent them forward towards himself. But some abusing their free will, miss the divine Sun that is the centre and

heart of all creation, then to start back into infinity, into a darkness whence they will never return. They are the "sidera errantia," the wandering stars driven into the empty void by the storm-blast of God's wrath.

Let no one set these things aside as mere metaphors, unfit for a scientific exposition; they are the word of God, and when God himself uses analogy and figure of speech, the study of God's metaphors is the most scientific treatment which the subject can bear.

Christ describes the state of the damned as one of outer darkness. Obviously physical darkness is not the only thing meant; it is also mental, spiritual darkness. As the eye is destined for the light, so is man's mind destined for the truth, but the truth is God. The inner desire to know is natural to every human being. Promise a man to tell him something new, and you will draw him from afar; he will submit to every hardship, if only he can come and listen. From the far-off days when Babylonian astronomers searched with naked eye the starry heavens till this day when a man bends over a microscope, the search for the truth is the dominant passion of humanity. Some degraded men may sink their being in sensual, sexual pleasures, but they are few, and even in them some desire for truth can never die. Satan well understood hu-

man nature when in Paradise he beguiled the first man with the lying promise: "If you eat from the fruit of the tree, ye shall *know*." God promised man as his supreme reward: "Ye shall know!" "This is everlasting life: that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." The reward is the clear unclouded sight of God in his own divine nature. This will completely satiate the human mind, which will rest in ecstasy on the object of its knowledge. The supreme Mystery will lie unveiled. But the damned are in darkness, and a cloud of ignorance clings to their intelligence. They know that they might have known, but they do not.

The raving madman is on earth an object of pity and horror to the sane-minded, but the damned are madmen of their own making; deliberately they have drugged their own minds with the poison of sin and their delirium is always upon them. Though God is so close to them and the natural forces of their intellect so keen in the world beyond, yet God is the maddening mystery to them, the tormenting problem which will never be solved. The man in a foul, dark fog which stings his eyes and blinds them, feels his gloom the more, if he recalls to himself that somewhere the sun shines and the sky is blue. So the damned grope and

stumble along in a mental mist that will never be lifted, though they know that somewhere the majesty and clarity of truth sheds its splendour and entrances beholders with its divine beauty.

The mind is darkened and the will perverted. Those whose work brings them to study the psychology of sin come across many cases of such incipient perversion even on earth. Final perversion is only an intensification, a fixing of a state by no means unknown here. The drunkard drinks, and inwardly curses himself for drinking. The debauchee wallows in sin, and detests himself for his loathsome cravings. The angry man smites in the moment of his anger, yet his own nature cries out while he strikes his friend. His cravings, his passions, his furies are upon him, they cling to him. Their grasp is more than an outward grip, they hold his will by inward compulsion. Sometimes in impotent remorse he cries out: "My tastes are foul, my desires are loathsome; I am a cruel beast, I know it, but I cannot, I will not change; I am what I am." When a friend or a priest comes and puts the horror of his conduct before him, he fiercely faces them: "You can tell me nothing I do not know. Preach to me? Man, I preach to myself every hour of the day, and then laugh in despair at my own eloquence! Matters have

gone too far, I am what I am, better leave me alone!"

For a long time some vague desire for good remains, a tear sometimes wells up for the virtue that is gone, the innocence that is lost. Then even that state passes away, at least in some rare cases. There is a delight in evil, a wish to spread evil, a hatred for what is good. The victim of lust hates all that is chaste and wants to destroy it. The victim of anger detests what is patient and meek and wants to crush it. The proud man repels the humble and wants to trample upon him. The sight of moral beauty rouses inner antagonism. He wants a recasting of all values. Good must be evil; evil must be good. Someone recently wrote his impressions of Bolshevik Russia. He was no minister of religion, he was no Catholic, I doubt even whether he was much of a believing Christian, but he wrote that what struck him most in his contact with Bolshevik circles was the existence of an almost demoniacal hate of chastity. An English novelist, who must be nameless, writes for the purpose of destroying the sacredness of marriage, to tear the heart out of the sanctities of wedded life. His purpose is avowed. He glories in it. A Nietzsche writes, or rather screams, that meekness, humility, purity are detestable evils, a morality only fit for slaves;

that all vice is really virtue, all hitherto esteemed virtue is the true vice.

If such things are possible on earth, is it not possible that such things happen in the world beyond? Is it not possible that at last such state of mind is irremediable, that a man's heart becomes vitiated beyond all cure, that he abides by his choice and will never change?

The Catholic Church teaches that the human soul remains in that state in which death finds it; if averted from God it will remain so for ever. Two parallel lines do not meet, even in infinity. The lost soul has definitely chosen another end and purpose than God, an end which is incompatible with God. Because its self-chosen end lies outside God, it will not only never reach God, but run its life in everlasting opposition to him.

It is difficult for us to understand that anyone should hate God. The perversity seems too monstrous; no one can hate the Infinite Good. The answer to this difficulty, however, is not far to seek. If the Infinite Good were directly perceived by the damned soul, he could, of course, not hate it. The fact is that the mind of the damned is darkened; though they are in eternity, they do not see God as he is. However vivid their imagination, however keen the realisation of his presence, it is indirect. It is still

by reason and not by an act of intuitive intelligence that they perceive him. As such he becomes an object of their hatred and detestation because he stands in the way of what they want, what they have chosen by a final act of personal choice. He is their supreme antagonist. Of a friend they have made a foe. Not that God has changed, but they have changed. They have perverted themselves.

Now it must not be thought that the drunkard for all eternity will want drink, or the sexual sinner debauch, or the angry man eternal strife. In the changed conditions of the Hereafter the precise objects of their choice will, indeed, differ. Alcohol has no attraction probably for a disembodied soul, nor women nor vulgar brawling. But what underlies these vices is the inordinate desire of self, self-gratification, self-exaltation, of whatever kind it may be. All sin is self-seeking as opposed to God-seeking. Any particular vice indulged in on earth is only a manifestation of the preference of self before God. This self-seeking remains in the damned, and it is the very core of their damnation. The true centre of all things is God, but they are self-centred. The supreme happiness we know is love, but love means to love someone else. To love God is the supreme act of altruism which is rewarded by true happiness, because the Divine

Other-One is infinitely good, and to possess infinite good is infinite happiness. The damned can love no more and therefore they are damned. Hell is the home of incurables. The disease that is beyond cure is their egoism. It is incurable because they everlastingly reject the only remedy that could heal them: the love of Some One Else instead of themselves.

2. *The Pain of Sense*

Although the punitive deprivation of the Beatific Vision constitutes the chief pain of hell, the Catholic Church teaches that, in addition to this negative punishment, there is also a positive pain afflicting the damned. This is commonly referred to as hell-fire. Strictly speaking, however, "hell-fire" is but an aspect of what is called the pain of sense as distinguished from the pain of loss.

For it must be well borne in mind that it does not suffice to say, that the pain of sense afflicts the body, whereas the pain of loss afflicts the soul. According to Scripture, hell-fire was prepared for the devil and his angels, but angels have no bodies and therefore cannot be afflicted in them. Nor have lost human souls a body till the last day, yet they will be tormented by fire forthwith after the Particular Judgement.

When speaking, therefore, of hell-fire we must keep in mind that we are not necessarily referring to bodily pain in contrast to mental pain, but to a pain which primarily affects the spirit or the soul, though after the General Judgement it will also affect the body. The difference between the pain of loss and that of sense consists in the fact that the former is caused by the absence of something, the latter by the presence of something. The former is negative, the latter positive. This hell-fire is something real, and it is something external to the sufferer, who undergoes its tormenting energies. The malice of every sin has two aspects: it is a turning away from God, and it is a turning towards creatures instead of God. The everlasting loss of God is the natural punishment for the rejection of God. What is called the pain of sense is the natural punishment for the abuse of created things, involved in turning to them, embracing them, endeavoring to possess them rather than God. It is, as it were, poetic justice, if such a phrase may pass, that he who refuses God and embraces a created thing, should lose God and have a created thing to torment him for ever.

The reality of this "hell-fire," as the instrument of the pain of sense, has never been defined by a solemn decision of Pope or Council,

making the denial of it formal heresy and punishing it by exclusion from the Church, but it is certainly contained in Holy Scripture, in the Fathers, and it is the practically unanimous teaching of theologians. It could no doubt be solemnly defined if occasion demanded, and had the Council of the Vatican not been interrupted, would probably have been defined. Meanwhile no Catholic can deny it without grievous sin against the faith, though this sin could not as yet be described as one of formal heresy, but only one of wilful error and temerity. In consequence the Sacred Penitentiary at Rome, being asked whether a penitent who declared to his confessor that in his opinion the term "hell-fire" is only a metaphor in order to express the intense pains of the demons, might be allowed to persist in this opinion and be absolved, answered as follows: "Such penitents must be diligently instructed and, if pertinacious, they must not be absolved" (April 30, 1890). This, of course, is a disciplinary, not a doctrinal decree, and obviously is not an infallible definition, but it makes it plain that no one can doubt the reality of "hell-fire" without grievous sin.

Hell-fire, therefore, is not a metaphor for the intensity of mere spiritual or mental sufferings; it is a reality, objectively present outside the

sufferer, and the objective cause of his sufferings. We may further ask: Are we bound to believe that God created this instrument of torture, as a new thing, called out of nothing by his omnipotence in addition to the other things he made, so that even if no devil or damned soul ever entered this fire, still it would go on burning, as if it were feeding on itself, though empty of spirits to torture?

No, not necessarily. Fire, as we have it on earth, is produced by oxygen fed by carbon, and through the vibration of the atoms brings about disintegration of the body that burns. Such fire hell-fire cannot be, for the bodies of the damned do not disintegrate, and we are not bound to believe that there will be an everlasting supply of oxygen and carbon. Moreover, "hell-fire" affects even the demons, who are pure spirits, and the damned, who until the General Resurrection are without their terrestrial bodies. In consequence, though hell-fire is a reality causing the pain of sense as distinct from the loss of God, and is some external agent whose action the demons and the damned undergo, yet this fire is only analogous to the fire we experience on earth. The instrument of this suffering is referred to in the New Testament no less than thirty times by the word fire, which word must therefore be the nearest anal-

ogy in our earthly experience to that which torments the damned.

Many theologians hold that the fire which torments the damned, though of course not an earthly fire like the fire in our grates, is yet some special creation of God, some external agent, specially called into being by God as the instrument of his avenging justice. It is, indeed, prepared for the devil and his angels, something, in fact, which would not have been but for the fact of Satan's sin; something which not only has nothing subjective about it, but is plainly merely an objective reality with which the demons and the damned come in contact and through which they suffer; something which would remain in existence, even though no devil or damned soul came within its power. They urge in support of this view the language of Holy Scripture in which hell is described as a lake of fire into which the damned are cast, described as a definite locality somewhere in the Universe, a place which can be entered and left. They urge, moreover, with force that tradition has ever seen in hell, not only some external agent tormenting the damned, but something as it were designed by the justice and holiness of God for the specific purpose of inflicting punishment on those that deserve it. In consequence, it must be something altogether distinct

from the rest of God's creation, an awful reality distinct from all the other works of God. It cannot be denied that the reasons brought forward are weighty and appear to many grave theologians conclusive. We must, indeed, always keep in view that the fire of hell is certainly not a mere metaphor for the pain of the loss of God, but some additional reality which will accompany it for all eternity. It is a pain inflicted from without, inflicted by some external material agent doing the behest of God.

Scripture, however, nowhere says that God "created" this fire, but only that he "prepared" it. It would, therefore, not be against Holy Writ to hold that without creating any new substances God so utilised existing creatures as to form them into a fire for the devils and the damned. The lost have turned to creatures instead of God; God in consequence makes creatures the instrument of their punishment. St Thomas in discussing this matter most aptly uses the[1] text: "The whole world will fight with God against the perverse," and he says: "Not the whole world would fight against the perverse if they were punished only with a spiritual punishment and not with a corporeal one. Therefore they will be punished with a corporeal fire."[2] As St Thomas, following the imper-

[1] Wisdom v 21.

[2] Sup. xcvii 5.

fect physiology of his day, regarded fire as an element, his explanation, however, valuable, must be reinterpreted in the light of present-day knowledge, which does not accept fire as an all-pervading constituent element of all things in the Universe. The essence of St Thomas's teaching seems to lie in this: that God has armed the whole Universe to fight on his side against the devils and the damned. God may have made this visible Universe itself a fire tormenting the devils and the damned.

Moreover, there may be a bond of intrinsic necessity between the rejection of God by the damned and their being tormented by fire. Hell-fire is, perhaps, not a punishment separately invented by the ingenuity of divine vengeance, a fierce after-thought as it were of God's wrath, to render the loss of himself more horrible, but the necessary outcome of man's nature in a state of sin, the inevitable result of the opposition between a perverted created will and the will of God, expressed in material creation.

In any case God is not merely the passive spectator of hell by simply allowing nature to take its course. God is no more a passive spectator of hell than he is of heaven. Nature has no being apart from God. God is active in all nature. It must ever be remembered that God

is not an impersonal force, but a personal intelligence, and that the demons and the damned are in opposition to a personal Being, and that from this personal antagonism all their evil flows. It is therefore quite correct to speak of God inflicting punishment on his foes, though it is wrong to think of this in human fashion as if God sought the satisfaction of a desire for vengeance.

Whether, then, the fuel of this fire be specially created for the purpose or whether it be the very matter of this universe, it is a fire which in its effects and mode of action differs greatly from earthly fire. Earthly fire can only burn bodies, hell-fire burns spirits. Earthly fire disintegrates and destroys what it burns, hell-fire does not dissolve what it burns, but is compatible with never-ending existence. Earthly fire needs a continual supply of new material fuel, hell-fire is everlastingly maintained by the will and the anger of God. Earthly fire is joined to some degree of light, hell-fire is compatible with outer darkness. Earthly fire is limited to some locality, hell-fire accompanies the damned wheresoever they are. Earthly fire burns equally all that is thrown into its furnace, hell-fire burns unequally the souls of the damned according to the greatness of their sin. When we thus multiply the points of difference between

the action of earthly fire and the fire tormenting the damned, we realise that we are face to face with a mystery which is beyond all our experience in this world.

How a material fire can torment a purely spiritual being we cannot fully explain. St Thomas explains it by the spirit being hampered, hindered and tied to this fire, which thus limits its freedom of action. This very imprisonment and enchainment is suggested as the cause of the soul's torment. This explanation to some may appear inadequate. However, that may be, all that we can, all that we *need* say with regard to the action of hell-fire upon spirits, is that by God's omnipotence fire will directly act upon a pure intelligence so as to cause it to suffer a pain to which the only parallel we possess on earth is the sensation of burning.

Hell is doubtless a place as well as a state. Such, at least, is the most natural inference from the texts of Scripture and was always taken for granted within the Church, though one could not say that it was held as a part of divine revelation. Where in the whole universe hell is, no one can say. Until the development of modern science, hell was spoken of as in the centre of the earth, and this mode of speech, referring to the realms below, or the lowest abyss,

will no doubt remain for ever customary, but it does not mean that the speaker has any conviction of faith that hell is somewhere below the earth's surface. The place of hell is simply unknown to us, for it has not pleased God to reveal it.

From what has been said it will be clear that the pain of loss, the chief punishment of hell, is far more grievous than the pain of sense. Nevertheless, it is these latter torments of hell that have most forcibly struck the imagination of men, and our Lord, by speaking in the Gospels of "hell-fire," deliberately stressed this side of eternal punishment, for he knew human nature and knew that sensible imagination would be the strongest incentive to a horror of the dreadful fate awaiting the unrepentant sinner.

It is true that sometimes both in pictures or in carvings, in sermons or in books, the torments of hell have been described with a crude realism which revolts a decent mind. Adversaries of Christianity have of recent years collected together many medieval prints and sculptures relating to hell, they have collected a number of descriptions of infernal tortures from patristic, medieval, and even more recent writers, and thus pilloried the ghastly ingenuity with which fantastic scenes of agony and cruelty were invented.

But the Christian, who peruses these tendencious works, must always call to mind that it is easy to collect from a vast literature extending over two thousand years quotations which in their accumulation give the impression that Christianity was a religion of terror and despair. It is only a deeper student with a more balanced mind who realises that such fantastic literature forms only an infinitesimally small part of the output of Christian letters; that as a matter of fact the predominant character of Christianity is one of joy, confidence, and hope; that the bulk of Christian literature expresses loving amazement at the goodness of God. The devout Christian sometimes pictures hell to himself, but he also has the tender sweetness of the crib of Bethlehem, the bright joy of Easter day, and he pictures the adoration of the Lamb and the saints in glory. Medieval architecture sometimes contains a carving of a devil as a gargoyle tormenting a damned soul, but the whole creates the impression of majesty, might, and exaltation, not of dread and doom. No doubt in some very few instances the representations of hell may be excessively gruesome and in still fewer even betray an unhealthy spirit. For such morbidities one need offer no defence. Christian writers and artists may have been at fault, but in the main both their purpose and

their execution have been wholesome and noble.

The pains of hell exceed in horror all that men can imagine; it is therefore right and just that even the imagination should be called in to warn men against the supreme and last danger that besets all men. Passion and temptation to sin can be so blinding that nothing but an almost physical recoil from the punishment threatened can succeed in drawing the mind and will away from the false enchantment of evil. One might grant that the psychology of the twentieth century is not quite the same as that of the tenth, that what would be an effective dissuasive from sin in the Middle Ages may not be so effective now, but the human soul remains throughout the centuries substantially the same. The motive of fear will always be potent for good as well as for evil, and with many the threat of bodily pain will be a stronger bridle on such bodily passions as anger and lust than anything else. If all that were ever written or painted or carved expressive of the tortures of hell could be brought before us at a glance, it would certainly fall immeasurably short of the truth. Though the precise agonies dreamt of by a vivid imagination may not be the exact counterpart of the sufferings of the lost, they symbolise a reality exceeding the

power of pen, brush, or chisel; they exceed all earthly imagination.

As in heaven there are different degrees of happiness, so in hell there are different degrees of punishment. The least degree of punishment will exceed in horror all we can imagine on earth, but even in hell there are depths below depths. The soul is alienated from God in the very measure of its deformity. The deformity caused by one sin can be greater than that caused by another, and according to the number of sins the deformity increases. There are therefore degrees even in the loss of God; the deeper the deformity the farther from God. The greater self-abhorrence in the damned brings about the deeper aversion from God, whose infinite holiness holds up the mirror to the monstrosity of the damned soul. In the pain of sense likewise there must be degrees. The fiercer the sinful grip on creatures which the sinner had in this life, the more fiercely will the vengeful fire torment him in the house of his eternity.

Therefore Dante's play of imagination, when, in his *Inferno* he describes all kinds and degrees of punishment, is not idle and useless, if it keeps before our mind that for the lost in some unique way the punishment will always fit their crime.

CHAPTER III

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN SCRIPTURE

As the Old Testament was a progressive revelation, the doctrine of everlasting punishment for the wicked gradually gained in clearness as the time went on and approached the fulness of revelation in Christ. The Jews began with an exceedingly vague idea of the world beyond the grave. Considering that the Jews stayed for many generations in Egypt, where the ideas about reward and punishment hereafter were worked out in such minute detail and with such terrible crudity, this mentality must be due to a deliberate refusal to entertain the thoughts of their fellow-countrymen and contemporaries, and it was no doubt the way of Providence to guard them from the fearful superstitions of the heathen world.

Moreover, as the gates of heaven were closed until Ascension day, no immediate bright future could be promised even to the saints of the Old Testament. It would have been cold comfort to Abraham to promise him two thousand years

of waiting in a realm of twilight before the dawn of day. God mercifully shrouded the details of the immediate future in after-life from the Jews of the Old Covenant. As the Patriarchal and Mosaic covenant was a tribal or national one, and had only indirectly to do with the individual, the prophets delivered their message usually to the nation as such; they promised and threatened national welfare or national disaster as the immediate sanction of national obedience.

The existence of retribution beyond the grave was no doubt implied in the realisation of their responsibility before Jehovah, but no attempt was made to think out its details, and ultimate retribution after this life as a stimulus to well-doing was left to the individual. Jehovah's rewards and punishments were terrestrial; they were bestowed or inflicted here, whatever happened hereafter. The Hebrew Sheol was apparently very much like the Greek Hades, just the Nether world. That the good fared well, the wicked ill, in that abode was of course taken for granted, but seemingly one knew too little about it to give it special mention. The prophets predict a great day of judgement and final retribution. This great day of Jehovah, though often conceived as national rather than individual, does involve a final and irreversible settle-

ment of human affairs some time in the future. Some prophets, especially Ezekiel and Daniel, clearly assert the eternal punishment of the wicked in a life beyond this earthly life.

The latter prophet writes: "At that time shall thy people be saved, every one that shall be found written in the book, and many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach to see it always."[1] In the great Maccabean struggle, the certainty of everlasting retribution steeled the wills of the martyrs: "It is better," so they said to the tyrant king, "being put to death by men, to look for hope from God, to be raised up again by him: for, as to thee, thou shalt have no resurrection unto life."[2]

Job certainly asserts the reward of the just after death, and this naturally implies the retribution of the unjust. In some Psalms, especially Psalm xlviii, the doctrine of eternal retribution after life is distinctly asserted. The shade of the wicked will be consumed in hell and have no other dwelling, but God will redeem the soul of the just from hell and take it with him. The Book of Wisdom deals with the lot of the just and the unjust in the world beyond. The first five chapters are directly devoted to the doctrine of everlasting retribution, and it is set out

[1] xii 1, 2. [2] 2 Mac. vii 14.

with unmistakable clearness. The lost, reflecting on their earthly life, groan in anguish of spirit: "Being born forthwith we ceased to be, and have been able to show no mark of virtue, but are consumed in our wickedness. Such things said the sinners in hell, for the hope of the sinners is as dust that is blown away by the wind, but the just shall live for evermore and their reward is with the Lord."[1]

There can be no doubt that a century before our Lord's coming the Jews, as a whole, were convinced believers in an eternal sanction after death. Even the Sadducees, who did not believe in angel or spirit or in the resurrection, will hardly have extended their denial to a survival after death and a consequent retribution. In any case, they stood outside the religious development of the vast majority of the Jewish people. The reader of the Old Testament must, however, be warned that the mere use of the word "hell" in an English translation of the Old Testament cannot be taken as a proof of a belief in hell, in the Christian sense of everlasting punishment. In most cases it represents Sheol, which is the Hebrew term for the world beyond, the pit, the tomb, or the Nether world.

The New Testament opens with the teaching of St John the Baptist. "Every tree that

[1] v 13-16.

bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire." Of Christ the Baptist prophesies: "His fan is in his hand, and he will purge his floor and will gather the wheat into his barn: but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." "He that believeth in the Son hath life everlasting, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him."[1]

This teaching of the Forerunner is in a most striking way continued by Christ himself. It is almost as if he takes the very words from St John's lips and endorses them. Christ comes to men to place them before an absolute alternative, either to accept his message or take the eternal consequence. "He that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come. Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree evil and its fruit evil, for by the fruit the tree is known."[2] "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost shall never have forgiveness, but shall be guilty of an everlasting sin."[3] "I go, and you shall seek me. And you shall die in your sin. Whither I go you cannot come. If you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sin. Amen, amen, I say

[1] Matt. iii 10, 12; Luke iii 9, 17; John iii 36.
[2] Matt. xii 32-33. [3] Matt. iii 29.

unto you that whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. Now the servant abideth not in the house for ever."[1] Christ closes the Sermon on the Mount, which is a summary of the moral precepts of the New Covenant, with exactly the same eternal unchangeable alternative. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them. Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name? And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Evil-doers, therefore, will meet a final doom "in that day." These words are graphically brought home to Christ's hearers by the comparison between the wise builder, whose house stands because it is built on a rock, and the foolish builder, whose house perishes because it is built on sand. "It fell, and great was the fall thereof." It is utter ruin; suggestion of rebuilding there is none; it is an irretrievable calamity.

[1] John vii 21, 24, 35.

The rejection of Christ by many Jews, the acceptance of Christ by many Gentiles, involves for them a definite exclusion or a definite inclusion in heaven without mention of a possible reversal of this state. "Many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."[1]

When Christ sent out the Apostles to preach, he said: "That which I tell you in the dark, speak ye in the light: and that which you hear in the ear, preach ye on the housetops, and fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can cause both soul and body to perish in hell."[2] Perdition in hell, therefore, is the death of the soul, and obviously a final verdict of damnation.

The Gospel of St Mark gives us the most explicit and fearsome warning from Christ's lips against hell-fire. "If thy hand scandalise thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life, maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into unquenchable fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished. And if thy foot scandalise thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter lame into life everlasting than hav-

[1] Matt. viii 11, 12. [2] Matt. x 28.

ing two feet to be cast into hell of unquenchable fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished. And if thy eye scandalise thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee with one eye to enter into the kingdom of God than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished, for every one shall be salted with fire."[1]

On the one hand, therefore, is "life," "the kingdom of God," "life everlasting," on the other hand never-ending torment; any hazard whatever on earth must be taken to avoid the latter and secure the former.

The word "hell" comes spontaneously to Christ's lips when speaking of the utmost penalty and the last stage of depravity. The greatest threat against the man who insults his brother, is that he is in danger of hell-fire. The greatest crime of the Pharisees is that they make a proselyte two-fold more the child of hell than they are themselves, and Christ's threat against them is: "How will you flee from the judgement of hell?" In all these cases our Lord calls hell by the Jewish term Gehenna, which means literally "valley of Hinnom," and refers to a gorge outside Jerusalem, where rubbish was shot and burnt and where unclean animals fed on garbage. For about two centuries before our

[1] Mark ix 42-48.

era, if not longer, this term had been used for the place of the reprobate, in contrast to Paradise, the place of the blessed. Our Lord used an expression, commonly used and understood even by the most simple, to express an idea of irretrievable final rejection and damnation. In the quotation from St Mark just given the term Gehenna is explained by Christ himself as "the unquenchable fire," and as the place "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." These last words are a quotation of the final verse of Isaias the Prophet. In this passage God promises Israel that "their seed and their name shall stand before him as the new heavens and the new earth, which he will make," "and all flesh shall come to adore before my face, saith the Lord, and they shall go out (of the holy city Jerusalem) and see the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be a loathsome sight unto all flesh."

This closing verse of Isaias describing the final consummation of Messianic times, the final triumph of the just and the punishment of the wicked, seems to have gripped the Jewish mind, for we find it twice quoted in later Jewish scriptures in Eccles. vii 19 and Judith xvi 21. In the latter book it is said: "In the day of judge-

ment he will visit them, and he will give fire and worms into their flesh that they may burn and suffer for ever."

Christ taught mainly by parables. Now five great parables end with the proclamation of eternal punishment for the wicked. Christ thus explains the parable of the tares and the wheat: "The field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom, and the cockle are the children of the wicked one. And the enemy that sowed them is the devil. But the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Even as the cockle, therefore, is gathered up and burnt with fire: so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send his angels, and they shall gather out of the kingdom all scandals and them that work iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

The parable of the net catching good fishes and bad ends almost in the same words: "So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out and shall separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The parable of Dives and Lazarus also ends in this way. Dives in the

nether world, being in torments, lifted up his eyes. "He saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom: and he cried out and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you is a great gulf fixed: so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither."[1]

The parable of the wedding feast[2] ends with the word of the king to the waiters concerning the man without the wedding garment: "Bind his hands and his feet and cast him into exterior darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In the parable of the talents the servant who hid the one talent received the same punishment. The parable of the foolish virgins ends with a final exclusion from the feast by the bridegroom, who peremptorily answers the virgins who knock: "Amen, I say to you, I know you not."

The parable of the servant beating his fellow

[1] Luke xvi 19 *ff.* [2] Matt. xxii 14.

servants because his master delayed, tells us that the master "shall separate him and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The Greek word "hypocrites," in this text as in several others, doubtlessly stands for the Aramaic and Talmudic term for the reprobate, the *haniphin*. Such servant is a final outcast, permanently separated from the good.

This ultimate separation of the reprobate from the good is graphically portrayed by our Saviour in his description of the last judgement. "All nations shall be gathered together before him: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats, and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. Those on the right shall receive eternal bliss in the kingdom of the Father, those on the left shall hear: Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting."[1] This is evidently a sentence without appeal, a definite verdict without possibility of reversal.

Although the Fourth Gospel represents a phase of Christ's teaching so deeply distinct from that of the three previous Gospels, yet in

[1] Matt. xxv 32, 33, 41, 46.

this point St John's Gospel is as emphatic, if not in fact more so, than the others. It is the everlasting alternative which is emphasised throughout. "Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son: that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."[1] "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me, and I give them life everlasting, and they shall not perish for ever."[2] "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world keepeth it unto life eternal." "He that . . . receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him. The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. The Father who sent me gave me commandment what I should say, . . . and I know that his commandment is life everlasting."[3] "Father, glorify thy Son . . . as thou hast given him power over all flesh that he may

[1] iii 5, 14-16. [2] x 27, 28.

[3] xii 24, 25, 48-50.

give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him." "Those whom thou gavest me I have kept: and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition."[1] The whole Gospel of St John becomes unintelligible unless the whole of mankind stands before the irrevocable choice between death or life, light or darkness, everlasting life or everlasting perdition. If the acceptance or the rejection of Christ does not involve eternal, but only temporary consequences, if Christ came to save only from a limited punishment, not from a final doom, the words of Christ in the Fourth Gospel are a shameless deception or palpable nonsense. Then the closing command of Christ on earth is much ado about nothing: "Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned." If ultimate salvation is secure for everyone, and if no ultimate condemnation exists, these words are unworthy, I do not say of Christ, but of any truthful man.

Christ's teaching is echoed by his Apostles. St John's teaching is easily gathered from the Apocalypse. A few words must suffice. "The devil was cast into the pool of fire and brimstone, where both the beast and the false prophet

[1] xvii 1, 12.

shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. I saw the dead standing in the presence of the throne. The books were opened . . . and whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the pool of fire. This is the second death."[1] St Peter writes: "Lying teachers shall bring in sects of perdition . . . whose judgement now a long time lingereth not, and their perdition slumbereth not. These men, as irrational beasts, naturally tending to the snare and to destruction, blaspheming those things which they know not, shall perish in their corruption."[2]

St Paul re-echoes his Master's teaching in these words: "Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of his power in a flame of fire, giving vengeance to them who know not God and who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall suffer as punishment eternal ruin from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."[3]

It is indeed difficult to read the New Testament and maintain that it does not teach the eternal punishment of the wicked. An attempt has indeed been made to maintain that the Greek word translated eternal or everlasting really means only "agelong," designating, in-

[1] Apoc. xx 9-15. [2] 2 Pet. ii 1, 3, 11.
[3] 2 Thess. i 9.

deed, a long period, but not strictly an unending one. This, however, is untenable.

Our Lord, describing the last judgement, ends saying of the wicked: "These shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting." In both instances the same Greek word is used, and as no one holds that the reward of the just will come to an end, it is against all reason to suppose that Christ meant the punishment of the wicked to be only agelong, but not unending. Moreover, the word occurs in the New Testament no less than seventy-one times, of which forty times refer to life everlasting, some ten times to our heavenly reward, such as everlasting kingdom, salvation, redemption, glory, inheritance, dwellings, etc., once in the phrase "everlasting God"; if then we also read "everlasting perdition," it is in the highest degree arbitrary to translate it by "agelong but not unending."

CHAPTER IV

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN TRADITION

THIS Scriptural teaching has been continuously, unhesitatingly, and emphatically proclaimed by the Church throughout all ages. It would be difficult to find a Christian dogma which, historically speaking, is more undoubtedly an integral part of the Christian revelation than the eternity of punishment for the reprobate. The supreme alternative between final salvation and final reprobation constitutes, and has always constituted, the very warp and woof of the Christian ethical system. The work of Christ in atonement and redemption has always been taken as that of a rescue from eternal damnation, never merely from a temporary punishment. The rejection of Christ has never been regarded as something which involved, indeed, a terminable period of distress, but not a final condemnation by God. The awfulness of the Christian appeal has always lain in the final choice between life and death, not in a reversible choice of a more or less lengthy period

of happiness or sorrow. The whole of its moral system, the whole of its soteriology or its scheme of salvation, is essentially, intrinsically bound up with the conviction that this life is a period of trial deciding an eternal issue.

One point, however, may be noted in reading the Fathers: that several, both Greeks and Latins, believed in a postponement of hell till the day of final judgement. Hell in the full sense of the word would begin, both for demons and damned, only after the sentence of Christ on the last day. Meanwhile the devils and the wicked would, indeed, undergo some punishment, but a punishment not complete, unchangeable, and final. In fact, some Fathers were confused in mind how to reconcile four points of divine revelation: first, the existence of purgatory, or the temporary punishment for some; secondly, the absence of the bodies of the damned till the final resurrection, and therefore the incompletion of their damnation; thirdly the freedom of the devils to roam about the world for the ruin of souls, and their subsequent inclusion in the pit of hell afterwards; finally, the exact bearing and purpose of Christ's sentence at the General Judgement and its relation to the fixing of a man's destiny at death.

In consequence, a few passages may be found which on first reading seem to involve a hesi-

tancy or ambiguity about the eternity and immutability of a sinner's state after death. On second reading, however, it becomes clear that there is no denial of the existence and eternity of hell, as a final, unchangeable state for demons and damned.

There are but few names amongst those of the Fathers which can be quoted as in some sense supporting the possible cessation of hell. Clement of Alexandria seems sometimes to dally with the thought, but the matter must remain obscure. On the one hand he states in a great number of passages the eternity of hell for the wicked, on the other hand he speaks of the medicinal punishments of God, and it is not quite certain that in all these passages he refers only to punishments during this life or at least previous to the last judgement. Scholars are divided on this question. Tixeront holds that Clement was probably unorthodox, Atzberger holds that most certainly he was not.

Origen was undoubtedly in grave error, and in consequence his doctrine roused the most vehement opposition throughout the Church. Origen was not consistent in his teaching. On the one hand he held that there would be "a restoration (*apokatastasis*) of all things," a final triumph of Christ by the conversion of the wicked; on the other hand he held the perma-

nent freedom of the will in its choice between good and evil, so that neither heaven nor hell were essentially eternal, but were subject to cycles. The restoration and completion of all was again followed by a fall, a trial, and a restoration, a conception which savours more of Buddhism than of Christianity. It must be marked, however, that even Origen does not give this as the teaching of the Church, but tentatively as his opinion on a question, discussion of which was still permissible. He gives it as a matter of possible speculation, and it seems that even he exempted some evil spirits from this general restoration or conversion.

About the year A.D. 300 Arnobius, a layman, in fact only a catechumen, wrote a defence of Christianity against the Pagans, in which he asserts the final annihilation of the wicked after long torments. His zeal made him rush into publicity before his knowledge of Christianity was very perfect. He founds his assertion not on any teaching of the Church, but on a philosophic theory that what is subject to fire must be composite, but that nothing composite can be eternal.

Origenism, which contained many errors besides that of the non-eternity of hell, caused the most violent disturbances everywhere. The great genius and the obvious sincerity of Origen,

who had died in the bosom of holy Church, raised him many friends and defenders. Condemnation of an author after death seemed a graceless and unworthy thing to many. It could, however, not be doubted that the seductive talent of so great a writer was a danger to the integrity of the faith. Finally, the Emperor Justinian, at the request of Pelagius, the Papal nuncio, and Menas, the patriarch of Constantinople, published a condemnation of Origen, which they had submitted to him. The Edict ended with ten anathemas, the last of which reads: "If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of the demons and the wicked will not be eternal, that it will have an end, and that then shall take place a restoration (*apokatastasin*) of the demons and of the wicked, let him be anathema." This was signed by Pope Vigilius, by the Synod of Constantinople of 543, and by the whole East, and in fact by the whole Christian world, at least within the dominions of Justinian. Ten years later Origen was condemned in the Fifth General Council, and the condemnation was renewed in the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth General Councils.

The doctrine of eternal reprobation is therefore one of those which has been held explicitly from the very beginning, and the unanimous assent to which was only disturbed during a

short period when a few, led astray by the great name of Origen, dreamt of a possible cessation of punishment at least for some of the lost.

We must bear in mind that the solemn definitions and the unanimous consent hitherto mentioned refer to the existence and the eternity of hell. With regard to the precise character of the pains of hell, there exists no solemn definition of Pope or Council, but the teaching of the ordinary magisterium of the Church cannot be in doubt. The Athanasian Creed, which dates probably from the fifth century, and which within a few generations afterwards received universal recognition by its practically universal use throughout the Church, ends with the words: "Those who do evil, shall go into eternal fire. This is the Catholic Faith, which unless a man faithfully and firmly believes, he cannot be saved." There can be no doubt that the fire here mentioned was ever understood as some objective reality. The great Pope Innocent III, in his letter of A.D. 1201 to Humbert, the Archbishop of Arles, states that "the punishment of original sin is the lack of the vision of God, but the punishment of actual sin is the torment of everlasting hell." Although this letter was not issued with such formality as to make it formally an utterance of

Papal infallibility, yet it was inserted in the *Decretals,* and by this fact became an authentic declaration of the ordinary teaching of the Church. This statement of Innocent III necessarily implies that the punishment of the damned does not exclusively consist in the mere lack of the Beatific Vision, but in something which is described as "perpetuae gehennae cruciatus." This same truth was implied in the approval which the General Council of Lyons (A.D. 1274) gave to the profession of faith of Michael Paleologus, which said that the souls of those who departed in mortal sin or in original sin only, forthwith after death go down to hell, to be punished, however, with dissimilar pains (Paenis disparibus). And again Pope Pius VI in 1794 condemned the Synod of Pistoia for rejecting the doctrine concerning "the nether world, in which the souls of those who depart in original sin alone are being punished with the pain of loss to the exclusion of the pain of fire." It is therefore of Catholic Faith, though not as yet solemnly defined, that the damned suffer something else besides the mere loss of the vision of God.

Finally, the decree of the Papal Penitentiary ordering refusal of absolution to those who pertinaciously assert that the fire of hell is only

metaphor for the mental sorrows of the damned, obviously implies real punishment besides that of loss.

Beyond the assertion that hell-fire is a reality, distinct from the pain of loss, the official and authoritative teaching of the Church does not go. Of the views held by theologians concerning the precise nature of this fire, something has already been said in an earlier chapter.

CHAPTER V

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT AND REASON

COULD human reason, unaided by divine revelation, in all rigour of logic prove the existence of eternal punishment? Possibly not. In a discussion which involves the appreciation of moral values, it is always difficult to construct an argument so compelling as to leave no loophole for doubt in those who are strongly averse to a particular conclusion.

In the case of all revealed doctrines, human reason can at least always show that they contain nothing contrary to right reason. In the case of the doctrine of hell, human reason can undoubtedly go much further. The human mind distinctly suggests, if perhaps it does not irresistibly prove, the necessity of an eternal sanction for good and evil. All weight of argument is really on one side, and the objections raised against the eternity of hell can be shown not to be the dictates of reason, but rather a darkening of the reason by feeling and sentiment. Human imagination is indeed appalled by

the thought of endless suffering, there is an instinctive recoil in the whole sensitive part of man from the picture of ceaseless sorrow, but these spontaneous emotions of our nature are a very unsatisfactory guide to follow in matters of reason.

Though both infinite mercy and infinite justice are found in God, it is beyond the power of our mind to see how they are reconciled. In the hearts of men, mercy and justice are accompanied by contrary affections, which seem to exclude one another. The former is apparently a softening, the latter a hardening of the fibre of our being. In human experience, therefore, mercy often expels justice and justice mercy. We are apt to transfer such emotions to God, and to imagine that infinite mercy cannot coexist with infinite justice. All this is a play of imagination, not of sound intelligence. We are influenced by it, because we realise that we stand in need of God's mercy for our eternal happiness and stand in dread of God's justice, since no man can think that he never did something amiss. It is therefore difficult in this matter to keep a clear head and let the intellect decide, and not the emotions.

Sometimes people express their difficulty in this way: How can we suppose that God will do what no earthly father would do? No earthly

father would punish his son for ever. His anger would at least relent, however much that anger was provoked, and at last he would forgive.

A scoffer has said: Christ spoke the parable of the prodigal son, whom his father forgave, and for whom he slew the fatted calf, though that son had lived riotously and wasted his inheritance. Let God himself first forgive man, and then command us to follow his example.

There seems at first something plausible in this bitter remark, but on deeper reflection it is seen to be more sharp than true.

The father in the parable forgave his son, because he repented. God forgives all those that repent and forgives them with a loving kindness that far exceeds that of any earthly father. The parable does not say that the father threw open his house to his son as long as he lived with harlots and wasted his goods. Had he given his son entrance to his house while unrepentant, it would have been an outrage on justice and a criminal condoning of vice, instead of a manifestation of paternal love.

God forgives all those that repent. There is a hell because there are some who do not repent for all eternity.

It is wrong to seek the explanation of hell in the divine desire or thirst for vengeance on the

sinner, who has outraged the divine Majesty. God desires nothing. God thirsts for nothing. He is in the calm and full possession of his divine happiness.

No doubt there is a sense in which one can speak of the wrath of God working vengeance on the sinner, and the Sacred Scriptures often thus express the punishment of evil-doers. When, however, we speak of God's actions in the language of men, we should never forget that God is not man, and that we can use human terms of him only analogously.

Let us suppose for a moment that there were no hell. What would this involve? It would involve that God is indifferent to sin. God is the author and creator of nature. If, then, our nature were such that whatsoever evil we did and for however long a time we did it, it could make no difference to our ultimate state, if for all eternity God would love us equally well whether we sinned or whether we did not, it would follow that God's nature is essentially indifferent to the morality of human actions. Let it not be said that God could punish the sinner for a time only, and so manifest his sanctity and abhorrence of sin. For there is no proportion between a limited space of time, however long, and eternity. No number of years, however extensive, can express a section or division, or part

of an existence that never ends. Eternity cannot be divided by time. Hence a punishment which only lasts for a while is by intrinsic necessity no adequate consequence of a deed whereby the creature rejects his God.

If one being can transgress the will of another being to any degree of intensity and during an indefinite length of time without thereby altering the relation between both, there can be no ethical bond between them. No law can exist without sanction. If the creature knows that notwithstanding his refusal to obey God's law he will be in the loving embrace of God eternally, then he must conclude that God is essentially indifferent whether we conform to his law or not. If God himself is fundamentally indifferent, why should the creature care? How can an action be evil, if the Supreme Intelligence and the Supreme Good is indifferent whether the action is done.

If it be retorted that in any case God is unchangeable in himself and therefore cannot be distressed by our sins, we quite agree, in the sense that no sin can rob God of his infinite happiness. But God expresses his will by the very order of nature, and if no sin can leave a permanent result on the human soul, then God, as author of nature, would thereby imply that nothing could permanently alter the relation of

an intelligent being to his creator; in other words, that human actions had for him no ethical value whatever.

Again, to suppose that there is no hell and could be no hell would mean a denial of God's omnipotence. It would mean that God could not create man and put him on trial for an eternal prize. In other words, man's nature would be the measure of God's omnipotence. Once created man could demand everlasting happiness, and that without being tested and tried, for trial without the possibility of failure is no trial at all.

But could not God have created a world without sin? Indeed he could, but he has not. Why he has not, is not ours to settle now. He has not, that is the truth that stares us in the face. Given then the fact that sin is, given the fact that men are on trial and some fail, it is a denial of divine omnipotence to assert the impossibility of an eternal sanction. It would make God the helpless tool of his own creation. The creature, once having been created, could make sport of his Creator, safe in the knowledge that whatever befell, the end was secure; even God could not change it.

It may be suggested that instead of eternal punishment, God might have decreed annihilation. But annihilation is in itself no sanction at

all. It is mere cessation of being; the non-existent cannot undergo any requital for past deeds. Such annihilation would presumably take place when the sinner was at the height of his sin, when he would suddenly pass away without any retribution whatever into nothingness. Perhaps the suggestion may be carried further that a period of punishment should precede the moment of annihilation. But this suggestion leaves the problem as it was before. Such period of punishment would either improve the sinner or make him worse, or leave him as it found him. If it had improved him, it is strange that it should be followed by annihilation; if it left him as it found him, or made him worse, annihilation is delayed without rhyme or reason, for his state immediately previous to annihilation would demand retribution as much or more than the state in which he was before the first retribution took place. Moreover, annihilation of a being by nature immortal means a reversal of God's own plan; it is a kind of stultification of his own work and a frustration of energy unworthy of the wisdom of God; it would be, as it were, a confession of impotence. The root of the difficulty against eternal punishment lies in this, that people picture it to themselves as a satiating of a lust of vengeance in God; they picture to themselves the damned begging

eternally for mercy and God eternally refusing it in spite of their unceasing supplication.

Now this whole conception is faulty. The devils and the damned never ask for mercy. One moment's repentance would empty hell. But that moment never comes. The damned have made their choice and abide by it; that is why their abode is hell. Hell is an appalling mystery, but let us at least place the mystery where it really lies. It lies not in any supposed cruelty of God, it lies in the wickedness of man. It lies in the power of self-determination, which man can abuse finally and irrevocably. No one suggests that the damned want hell because they enjoy its torments; the damned want hell because they have once for all decided that they do not want God, and there is no heaven without God. They need God eternally, but eternally they do not want him.

But this is madness, may be retorted. Indeed it is, but all sin is madness, all sin is unreason, yet men commit it, and freely commit it. The mystery lies in the abuse of the power of self-determination, not in the necessary sanction subsequent to its abuse. If we fully understood what sin is, there would be no difficulty in understanding hell, for hell is only sin continued. A man can fix himself in evil as well as in good. Human nature gradually sets and,

if the word be permitted, solidifies. A humble comparison with plaster or cement or molten metal that sets and hardens may not be out of place. In fact, hell is an application of the true law of evolution. Man is a being in progress. He is for a time in a state of transition, in process of development towards his final state, whatever it be. He passes through a period of possible change, but this period is not indefinite; there is a moment when he has reached the terminus of his possible evolution, and is in a final stationary condition.

In this matter man takes his place in the general evolution of all life. If man had no final state, he would be a contrast to the whole of nature. All life passes through the stages of birth, development, to its final state. Every flower is a germ, a bud, a complete flower. Every tree a seed, a young plant, a full tree. Every animal passes from the embryo stage, to youth, and ends in its final condition. Now injuries done to the plant in its stage of development have permanency of some kind. A tree injured or thwarted grows to final deformity, a deformity which is never reversed by nature till the tree ceases to be. A gnarled oak is what it is through a number of causes during its agelong existence, but its process of evolution is to our knowledge never reversed or altered. In the

end it will die, because it is material, and no matter can resist decomposition, but its life cannot be undone and its development rolled backward. If an animal's eye or ear, or hand or leg be destroyed, this destruction is final; it will be for ever blind or deaf or maimed or lame, as long as it is. Nature does not reverse her process. She does not give it another eye or ear or hand or leg, she does not undo the loss. In every life there are occurrences which are irrevocable as long as that life lasts.

Now the soul-life of man is no exception. Man by his actions can permanently and definitely affect his own innermost being, he can make or mar himself for good, and since his soul has a never-ending existence, he can do what can never be undone, even for all eternity.

What human reason itself suggests is made certain for us by Revelation, which teaches that the relation in which man stands to God at the moment of death is final, definitive.

If man had no final state, he would be an anomaly in God's universe. No act of his could influence his ultimate state, or produce an absolute and permanent result. If his will-acts are indefinitely reversible, then he flounders through an endless existence in helpless impotence. There is no ideal in the ultimate attainment of which

he may find repose, no perfect achievement which renders his manhood complete. Buddhists seem at first to accept this strange and sad illusion. Their highest deities can still leave their heaven and sink back to earth in a new reincarnation, after which they can rise again to some heaven and fall away again. But even Buddhists, though they delight in adding up innumerable *kalpas* of myriads of years each, still finally after billions and trillions of years let a man achieve arhatship and nirvana, that is, permanency of some kind.

Granted an immortal being with free will, surely heaven and hell, eternal conformity or opposition to God, eternal happiness or sorrow seem necessary deductions, unless free will be robbed of its only dignity, of that which alone constitutes its connatural purpose and value.

There may arise in the reader's mind the thought that one earthly life is not long enough to decide an eternal issue. It should be remembered, however, that eternity is not a multiple of time. A life of threescore years and ten stands to eternity in no more distant relation than an existence of a thousand years. The shortness of the time of trial may be regarded as a blessing as well as a hardship. Surely a saint on his deathbed would feel keen disappointment

if told that one earthly life was not long enough to purchase a happy eternity. Even the sinner may gain by the fact that the trial is short; a lengthier trial might have ended in greater disaster.

Sometimes an all too imaginative preacher may picture how, after a long life of virtue, one mortal sin brings a man to hell. To such flights of rhetoric we may reply that there is no certainty that such a thing has ever happened. Of this we may be sure, that God takes no delight in taking the sinner unawares, that he may hurl him into hell after his only mortal sin. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son unto death, yea, unto the death of the Cross. If we want to guess in any way who or how many go to hell, we must never forget that the lake of eternal fire is at the foot of the hill of Calvary, and that no one can go to hell without crossing the path that goes over that hill. As Catholics, we do indeed believe in an eternal hell, and our reason itself almost demands an eternal sanction for good and evil, but it is perversity of mind to forestall the judgements of God, as if we knew that the majority of men go to hell. Bethlehem and Nazareth, Gethsemane and Golgotha, do not tend to show that the bulk of mankind will be lost. To most men

now it would seem a poor triumph for the Man of Galilee if at the consummation of the world Satan swept the majority of the children of men away with him into everlasting darkness.

On the other hand, it is equally foolish to indulge in the facile jest: "I believe in an eternal hell, eternally empty." Such words made a mockery of the Gospels, and especially of Christ's words to the wicked on the day of judgement: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels from the beginning of the world." God has left us no revelation concerning the number of the lost, and no guess of ours can take its place. If a man dies in mortal sin, if a man dies without sanctifying grace, he is eternally lost, so much we know; but who dies in mortal sin we do not know. Mortal sin requires full knowledge and full deliberation. It is not like some ghastly blunder which a man might commit before quite knowing what he was about. No one goes to hell except he march into it with his eyes open. Not, of course, that he must beforehand realise the awfulness of its pains, but he must fully realise that he chose evil and not good, and he must have persevered in his choice until death.

We know little of the secrets of the individual

amount of personal guilt, we know little of the possibilties of repentance. Catholics have always felt it to be a kind of sacrilegious usurpation of God's prerogative to say of any person: "He has gone to hell." Leaving these things alone, our only concern is so to live and so to warn others, that neither we nor they be amongst those who receive Christ's curse on the last day.

CHAPTER VI

SPECIAL QUESTIONS RELATING TO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

THE Scriptural word "fire," as we have seen, may not be taken as a mere metaphor. It has been asked whether we are also to understand literally "the worm that dieth not"; what, in any case, the meaning of the expression may be.

The two expressions, "the unquenchable fire" and "the undying worm," are clearly not on the same level. The latter is used in the New Testament only on one occasion, when our Lord, according to St Mark,[1] thrice makes the obvious reference to Isaias lxvi 24, whereas the fire is nearly always mentioned in conjunction with everlasting punishment. Christ, in using a well-known expression of the ancient prophet on this one occasion, does not indicate precisely what is metaphorical and what is not, but both he and the Apostles by their constant and almost exclusive use of "fire" for hell give clearly to understand that this latter word indicates some physi-

[1] ix 42-47.

cal reality. We are therefore free to interpret "the worm that dieth not" metaphorically. As a matter of fact, this is usually done. Some take it as a metaphor for the loathsome and foul state of the damned, which resembles the stench and corruption of the grave. Others have seen in it a symbol for the biting pain of everlasting remorse.

A question may be asked regarding the instrumentality of the devils in increasing the torments of the damned. From the earliest even to the most modern pictorial representations of hell it has been customary to portray the damned as undergoing the most excruciating tortures by demons. What have we to believe of all this? First of all let us remember that the devils are pure spirits, however evil they are. The use of chains, pitchforks, and pincers and of all material instruments of cruelty is obviously a mere play of the imagination. Moreover, it is rather a childish supposition that at the end of all things God should eternally maintain a store of such things for the purpose. Yet beyond doubt the power of the devils to be a source of affliction to the damned is real. This affliction will arise from the twofold source of their companionship and their dominion. Demons and damned are enclosed in the same hell, and the imagery of Holy

Scripture leads us to believe that the perpetual and intolerable nearness of innumerable beings will be an added horror to the damned. Moreover, the devils, as angels, are mightier than the damned, who ever remain but men. These men, however, by sin have yielded to the temptation of evil spirits, and therefore chosen them as masters rather than God. They have surrendered to their dominion, and in consequence remain under their tyranny for evermore. How this tyranny is exercised we have no conception. Somehow, overwhelmed and mastered by giants in evil, the souls of the damned will be cowed and terrorised into everlasting submission.

A further question must refer to the existence of time in hell. Eloquent and ingenious preachers have thought of many similes in order to bring home the endless duration of hell, but it must be remembered that according to the Scriptures: time then shall be no more. Time is the measure of change. But both the blessed and the lost have come to their final state, and are no longer beings in a state of progress. They have entered a changeless world. They are not, indeed, in eternity as God is, who possesses the whole of his infinite being at once, but they have entered upon a state to which there is no parallel on earth. To count hours and days and

years is possible only where things still change and move. What an immutable life implies we cannot imagine, and it is idle to conjecture. At the moment of the death of the damned the clock struck, and the hands will move no more.

The question has sometimes been raised whether everlasting punishment is a matter completely excluded from the mercy of God and abandoned only to the rigour of divine justice. Although we have not sufficient data in Revelation to answer this question satisfactorily, it has been almost universally assumed by theologians that the punishment of the damned is less than they deserve and less than in strict justice might have been inflicted, so that every sentence of the Great Judge is, in fact, a merciful one. It has further been asked whether some respite or some lessening of punishment could be admitted, at least sometimes, in hell, so that even after the sentence there still remained some play for God's mercy.

There have been some ancient writers who held that there would be some lessening of punishment, as, for instance, the hymn-writer Prudentius. This Spanish Christian poet, born in A.D. 348, imagined that perhaps on Easter night some relief was granted to the lost. St Augustine, in a rather ambiguous though disapproving sentence, seems to allow prayer for

the lost previous to the last judgement, though he most strenuously combats those who think that the punishment of the damned is not eternal, or that their state can be in any way changed after the judgement. In a medieval manuscript there was found a prayer for one about whose soul one is in doubt. This prayer asks that the Mass may obtain for him, "if unworthy to rise again to glory, at least that his torments may be more bearable." These slight indications of a hope to lessen the pains of the lost show by their exceeding insignificance and rarity that the spirit of the Church and the common feeling of the faithful are strongly against the practice of praying for the lost. Hence we may well endorse the words of St Thomas Aquinas: "The above opinion is presumptuous; inasmuch as it is contrary to the statements of the saints, it is worthless and resting on no authority. It is not in accordance with reason, first because the damned in hell are outside the bond of charity, by which the works of the living extend to the dead; secondly, because the damned have utterly come to the terminus of their life, receiving the ultimate requital for what they deserve even as the saints, who are in their final home."[1]

A further question has agitated the minds of

[1] *Summa*, Supplement. Q. 71, a. 5.

theologians, viz., whether the life of the lost is one of undiluted sorrow and pain, or is still capable of some natural satisfaction, the joy of attaining some object of desire. The devils, so it is argued, must derive at least some malignant satisfaction in tempting men to sin and in succeeding in their endeavour. If, then, they are capable of such gratification, however wicked, it would seem that some joys are still left to them. It is difficult by merely philosophical arguments to disprove the suggestion; but on the other hand, the Scriptural description of hell in no way implies joy or satisfaction of any kind in the place of the damned. "I am tormented in this flame," cried Dives, and the petition that a finger dipped in water should be laid on his tongue was not granted.

So likewise it has been suggested that while the pain of loss is indeed never-ending, because it corresponds to that element in sin which gives it a certain infinity, namely, the soul's aversion from God, yet the pain of sense will sometime come to an end, because it corresponds to the turning of the sinner towards creatures, an abuse of creatures that can have only a finite malice and therefore a finite punishment. This suggestion cannot, perhaps, be proven *a priori* to be unfounded, but Scriptural language gives no countenance whatever to the idea. The word

"everlasting" is most often attached precisely to the word "fire," and it seems altogether contrary to the tenor of Holy Scripture to maintain that the fire should end but the punishment continue. It is therefore an idle guess, which is difficult to reconcile with the inspired Word of God, a guess which is prompted only by the mistaken feeling that the positive pain of the fire is greater than the pain of loss. It is a guess which finds no support whatever in tradition, and which even on the grounds of reason is very difficult to defend. It must therefore be definitely rejected.

A few stories, of a legendary rather than of an historical character, have been current in bygone ages of people having died in mortal sin, who through the prayer of some saint have been raised to life and given another chance of earning heaven. This is not the place to discuss the foundation of fact which may possibly underlie some of these stories. Sober historians would say that it is very little. Be this as it way, were they even true, they cannot be alleged as exceptions to the eternity of hell; they would rather be instances of the suspension of the Particular Judgement normally succeeding death. The instances told in the Gospel of Christ raising the dead, the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Naim, and Lazarus, are such excep-

tions. Moreover, some dead have been raised to life since Gospel days.

Whether all consciousness ceased between the moment of death and the moment of resurrection we cannot say. In all probability it did. In any case, by a special ordinance of God the divine judgement on these souls did not take place at the instant of their bodily death, as their allotted time of trial was not yet completed. We may rest quite certain that if any return of unrepentant sinners to earthly life has ever taken place, these sinners were not yet in hell. Both revelation and reason make this obvious.

The question may be asked what is the relation of the inmates of hell to those who still dwell on earth? Of the devils we know that they roam through the world for the ruin of souls. Until the last day in the providence of God the demons are allowed to tempt and to harm men. The fall in Paradise was caused by a devil from hell; no doubt many of the last sins committed before the final doom will still be the outcome of temptations from hell. The abyss will be closed only at the end of time. Do the damned similarly roam through the world for the ruin of their fellow men?

No, the case of the devils is different from that of the damned. The devils, by virtue of their higher nature as pure spirits, can come

into contact with us and with the material world, and they can use this power to tempt and harm us. Such power is indeed completely under the control of God's supernatural providence, but it is natural to an angelic being. It is not so with the discarnate souls of men. These souls are by nature the life-principle of a human body, and through this body they come in contact with the material world. In their discarnate state they are incomplete beings. It is not natural to them to act on matter in this incomplete state. They can be active within themselves by thought and will, as they can subsist in themselves even without the body, but there is no connatural means of communication between them and the outer world. Whatever they know of earthly happenings is conveyed to them by some special ordinance of God, whatever influence they possess on the material world is bestowed on them by some preternatural means. We do not know the details of God's dealings with them; we could only know them by revelation. Now revelation tends to show that no such communication, no such influence is normally granted to them. We pray, certainly, to be protected against the devils, we do not normally pray for protection against the damned. If some apparitions of the damned have taken place, they are so exceedingly rare

that they must be classed as distinctly miraculous, and not the outcome of their normal powers. The power to manifest themselves and to influence the living is perhaps not infrequently granted to the blessed in heaven and also to the souls in purgatory, but it is apparently seldom, if ever, given to the damned. The few stories told about the damned appearing, speaking, or acting after death contain fearsome warnings to the living. Such apparitions seem to have been allowed by God as an act of mercy to those on earth rather than as a permission to those in hell to hurt the faithful. The claim, therefore, of spiritists that "beyond the veil," as they say, all the dead, whether good or bad, have on occasion the power to communicate with the living is not admitted in Catholic philosophy. Whatever power to manifest themselves to the living the departed may possess is a special gift of God, not a natural outcome of their state. If then at a spiritistic séance an evil spirit—an earth-bound spirit as they would call it—really manifests itself, the presumption is that this spirit is a devil, not a damned soul, though God in his omnipotence could grant such power to the damned. Of this Catholics are quite certain, that if such manifestations really take place—a supposition not readily to

be admitted—they are not those of souls in heaven or in purgatory.

A final difficulty is sometimes urged against the doctrine of hell in this wise: surely God would not do what is eternally useless, surely God would not concur in the maintenance of an eternal evil, thereby admitting the eternal failure of his own plans for man!

Hell is not useless. The fear of hell as a motive of sorrow for sin has been, and is, instrumental in making saints. Many a soul has been helped to heaven by a salutary fear of hell. Hell is not useless. The blessed in heaven do not rejoice in the pains of the damned as such, yet they do eternally rejoice that they are saved from so great an evil, and the very greatness of the evil avoided adds to the enjoyment of the happiness secured.

Hell is not an eternal evil. That the damned should be in heaven, the blessed in hell, would indeed be evil, but that every one should receive according to his works is not evil, but good. That man should have free will and decide his own eternity is no evil. Hell is indeed evil to the damned, but not evil to God, not evil in itself. Infinite goodness still remains infinite goodness, though some freely reject it.

Hell is no divine failure. If God willed that

all men, whether they freely chose him or not, should go to heaven, then God would indeed have failed if any went to hell. God wills men to go to heaven if they love him, and this divine will is eternally triumphant. If a soul which did not love God above all things were in heaven, this would not be triumph, but defeat. Moreover, God wanted multitudes in heaven, not to increase his own happiness, but to bestow his infinite bounty on them. He carried out his plan to the full; the damned have deprived themselves of happiness, not him. He communicated his divine life of glory to as many as he would. Those that refused the proffered gift still glorify his justice, which withdraws his bounty from all that refuse it. Their very existence is still in obedience to his power and wisdom; they obey him not with their free will, but as irrational and inanimate creation obeys him, by continuing to be in that state which he has adjudged to them.

No one would deny that the doctrine of hell baffles the human mind, but it is a lesser mystery than the mystery of Bethlehem or Calvary. The human mind can understand more easily that God should punish everlastingly those that die in sin, than that God himself should die upon the Cross to save them from everlasting punishment.

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